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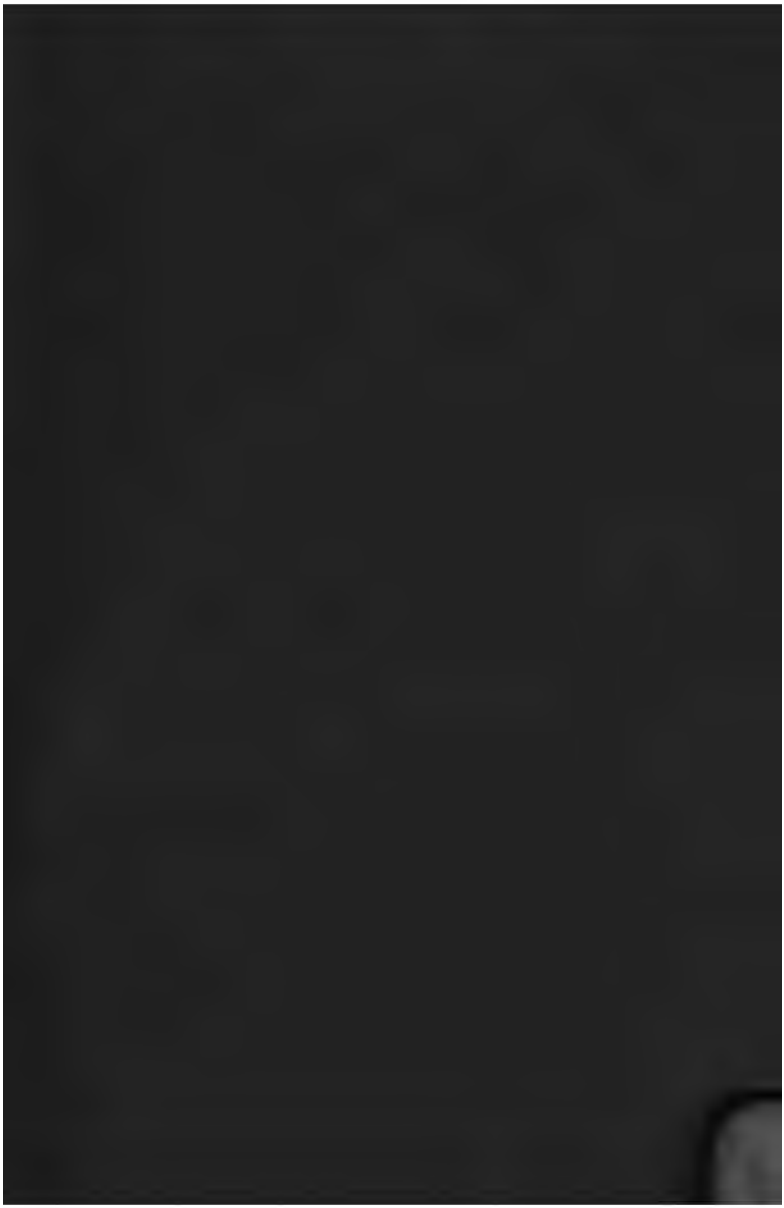

MEDITATIONS

OF THE

SISTERS OF MERCY

Before Renewal of Vows.

BY THE

LATE RIGHT REV. DR. GRANT,

BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK.

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CONTENTS.

MEDITATION		PAGE
I.	On Silence	5
II.	On Poverty	14
III.	On Mortification	21
IV.	The Obedience of St. Joseph	31
V.	The Death of St. Joseph	41
VI.	Our Immaculate Mother of Mercy	47
VII.	The Sacred Heart of Jesus	53
VIII.	The Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament	65
IX.	Preparation for Holy Communion	73
X.	Thanksgiving after Holy Communion	81
XI.	The Interior Life	89
XII.	My Last Renewal of Vows	97
XIII.	The Presentation of Mary	104
	Form of Renewal	113
	Horarium for Retreat	114
	Some General Directions for Retreat	115

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To the greater glory of God.

RENEWAL OF VOWS, January 1, 1863.

MEDITATION I.

On Silence.

IF the Sisters of Mercy cannot be assembled in one Convent for their Retreat, they must endeavour to make it in their separate Houses with *one* spirit of submission to their Holy Rule, and of ardent and affectionate attachment to their Institute. This filial submission implies, amongst other things, a sincere love of Silence, and this Silence must be such as all spiritual writers inculcate, interior as well as exterior. A Sister must respect the hours of Silence,

lest she should be guilty not only of disobeying the Rule, but also of checking the holy thoughts that are passing in the minds of her Sisters. She must cherish the virtue of Silence, not from a selfish wish to avoid taking her part in the recreation and innocent conferences that make recreation useful, but because this virtue is necessary for those who wish to walk with God. He cannot speak while we are speaking, and if we persist in breaking silence, He must leave us and speak in preference to Sisters who are willing to attend to Him. Thus, he asks for Silence also in our inward hearts, for unhappily there are many who observe outward Silence, and are yet in a constant turmoil and noise of heart with themselves. You may have noticed this inward talkativeness, when you have come away displeased with a Sister, and have spent the time of recollection in imagining how you could have answered her, and how much you could have mortified her. But Silence,

like other virtues, is the fruit of prayer and of meditation on the example of our Divine Lord.

Let us adore Him, and make an act of contrition for our sins which keep us from understanding His example, and let us ask His Dear and Immaculate Mother to explain it to us. Sweet Mother of Mercy, we are Thy children, and we entreat Thee to teach us. *Ave Maria.*

In our Blessed Lord there was the *Silence of Preparation.* How mysterious is this Silence, when we know that by His Word all things were made, and when we think that all His Words are so precious that Heaven and earth will pass away whilst they will remain and be fulfilled! If the Elders and Doctors of the Law were amazed when they noted the wisdom of His answers at the age of twelve, why was He so long silent? He wished us to feel that they who are to guide others must prepare their words by long silence and deep meditation;

and therefore in the years that preceded His ministry, the Gospel describes Him as speaking only on this one occasion to the Priests and in reply to His Blessed Mother. Nay, for a time He made Himself incapable of speaking, and passed the days at Bethlehem and the months that followed them until He had attained the age at which children first learn to speak; and He, Who makes the tongues of infants eloquent, hid His power and uttered gradually a few words—the earliest sounds of that eloquence that was afterwards to draw thousands away from home and even from the thought of providing food for the day, eager only to hear the lessons of His Divine speech. Does it not contrast strangely with our reluctance to be silent when we remember, that in order to teach at the age of thirty, He remained, with only one interruption, silent during all the first and longest part of His life?

More wonderful still is *His Silence of*

Active Work. He holds the earth in the hollow of His hand, and He sustains and supports it by His Fatherly Providence; and yet none of us has heard His voice, save in those quiet inspirations that tell us His wishes in our regard. He worked side by side with St. Joseph for many a long year; and such was His Silence that when He afterwards spoke in the Synagogue, 'all wondered at the grace that came from His mouth and said: Is not this the Son of Joseph?' If He had spoken at all, He must have spoken wisely, and His Words would have marked the future Master of Truth and Wisdom, and all would have expected His teaching to exceed the knowledge acquired from St. Joseph. When He entered upon His Apostolic Life, how often did He return to His beloved Silence! There were the nights spent in the prayer of God, those of which it is written, 'I sleep, and behold I am awake.' There was the placid Silence when, after He had

replied to His enemies once or twice, He was again silent. There was the peaceful countenance that made children so happy to be near Him, and that made it possible for any one to ask for an explanation, a cure, or a grace. When a duty is assigned to us, His Silence will admonish us to set about the work readily and patiently, without asking so many explanations about it as to make a Superior think it will cost less time to do the work herself, or without speaking so much while the work is going on as to prevent other Sisters from attending to their share of it.

More admirable still is our Lord in the *Silence of Suffering.* There was suffering when He wept in the cold midnight at Bethlehem, and yet He murmured not; there were privations during the flight into Egypt, and He did not complain; there was suffering when He chose as His companions and intimate friends, not the wise, the learned, the refined philosophers or princes of the

world, but rough uneducated fishermen, and was with them on the water, and helped them in their fishing, or prepared their meal and shared it with them. There was suffering when He instituted the most Blessed Eucharist, and when He felt that one of the Twelve was receiving Him unworthily, and when, under the semblance of respect, the same Apostle betrayed Him to His enemies. Keen and many were the daring speeches of the soldiers when He was in prison, and they blindfolded and buffeted and mocked Him, and He spoke not. When He was in the court of Herod and was much questioned, He answered not, and was therefore contemned and treated as fool by the king and his army (S. Luke xxiii. 2), and was led back to Pilate clothed in a white garment. The scourging was so cruel, that from the sole of His foot to the top of His head there was no sound place in Him, and all His bones could be reckoned; and He did not plead that the torments might be stayed

or even mitigated. When He was crowned with thorns, and the soldiers were kneeling in derision before Him, He, whose lightning had destroyed the two bands of soldiers who insulted His prophet, was meek and humble of heart. An appeal to the gratitude of the many whom He had blessed would, if He had made it, have moved the crowd to demand His release; but He spoke not whilst they cried out 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' During the three hours of the darkness, when a hard dry wind, wonder cold, was blowing what time He was dying on the Rood (B. Juliana of Norwich), He bore His anguish in silence, and said only before or after the darkness the Seven Words that have been preserved to us. One of these words was, 'I thirst.' And for what did He thirst? He thirsted for the salvation of souls, and amongst them He thirsted for the souls that were to follow His Immaculate Mother and the holy women to Calvary, true and devoted Religious, fervent and

loyal in their Vocation. He thirsted for souls that were weary of the long and meaningless conversations that had wasted their time and trifled away the energy of their minds before they left the world, and were willing to choose Silence for their lasting inheritance. He thirsted for souls that would grieve over an idle word, lest it should cheat them of the cheering sound of the voice of their Heavenly Father, or should render their next visit to the Blessed Sacrament cold, and devoid of feeling and devotion. In vain would His Mother, conceived without sin, pray for our Vocation, if He was to find us ever ready to seek excuses for talking, and never sincere in our intention to honour Him in His threefold Silence—the Silence of Preparation, the Silence of Work, and the Silence of Suffering.

O Dearest Mother, pray that, like Thyself, we may treasure His words in our hearts, and from this moment seek our happiness in holy and religious Silence.

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MEDITATION II.

On Poverty.

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISIUM called Poverty his sister, and in his seraphic Order his love of poverty is a tradition that none of his children would have the heart to undervalue. When St. Dominic witnessed its power over the disciples of his friend St. Francis, he was filled with such deep admiration that he bequeathed it as a precious inheritance to his own Order. The Church clings to the recollection of the primitive time of the Apostles, when the spirit of poverty made all throw their wealth into one treasure; and therefore she encourages the Religious Orders, in which through their Vow of Poverty, if it be faithfully observed, those holy days of early fervour are preserved through every suc-

ceeding age. But the Christians whose gifts were received by St. Peter, and were distributed by St. Stephen, had studied the poverty of our Divine Lord; and if we are called to continue their life, we must come to the fountain of living waters which refreshed their souls, the example of our Heavenly Spouse.

Our Immaculate Mother shared His poverty, and will remind us of the instances of it which the Gospel has recorded. *Ave Maria.*

His infancy dawned on a life of poverty, and the scene of our composition of place, as St. Ignatius styles this prelude to our Meditation, may easily be found in the Stable, open to every wind, cold, lowly, damp, and wretched. Thence He will be carried to the Temple, that His Mother may give as His ransom the offering of the poor. When He grows up, He will earn His daily bread by His daily toil in the workshop of St. Joseph, and as subject to

him. When He gathers His disciples around Him on the Mount, one of His earliest lessons will be in praise of the poor in spirit. He will choose His Apostles, the companions of the rest of His life, amongst men whose ignorance, whose habits of thought, whose defects, would contrast wonderfully, if He were not really poor in spirit, with the depth and accomplishments of His own mind. He will accustom His life to their condition in life, and will be amongst them when their hunger will make it necessary for them to gather the ears of corn as they are passing through the fields. He must work a miracle in order to provide the tribute which He and St. Peter, the chief of His Apostles, are to pay. He will tell us how the birds of the air have their nests, and the beasts of the field their caverns, but that the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. Weary with a day's journey, He will ask for a draught of water near the well. When He is placed

in the Tomb, a stranger must offer to His Mother the winding-sheet and the myrrh. Triumphant in His resurrection, He will, surrounded by His friends, partake of some fishes and bread. Nay, He will Himself prepare their scanty meal, kindle the fire, and broil the fish upon it.

How can we presume to love Him, if Poverty is not our sister? And yet, if the truth must be spoken, how seldom have we tried to make our Poverty resemble His! Some imagine that they have gained this virtue when they have resigned their worldly wealth, and have pronounced their vow; and they forget that as, like obedience, it must have the twofold reward of making us imitate Him on earth, and of being marked and crowned in Heaven, it should be practised through life. This practice implies repeated and affectionate acts of the virtue, as well as the amendment of the faults that are unworthy of its true spirit. Unless we consider it often, we shall not

pray for it, and shall not make ourselves feel the want of it, or the desire to possess it. When we see the poor in their homeless homes, stretched on a floor, or at most on a few handsful of straw, languishing from want of food, unprovided with medicines, disregarded by children and relatives, they are reflecting to us faintly and distantly the poverty of Him Whose bed was the Cross, Whose medicine was vinegar and gall, Whose attendants were cruel and mocking soldiers, Who had no shelter when the cold, as of midnight, was passing through His open wounds. When we knelt before Him on the day of our Profession, such was the Poverty that we promised to honour, and to uphold by our example; and in the spirit of the same Poverty we ought to renew our vows. But if this evening something is offered in the Refectory that we dislike, will it be accepted joyfully and thankfully, as the poor receive the broken bread that we are able to give them? If

our habit seems old, or worn, or of rougher texture, shall we think readily of our Lord, when the soldiers divided His garments, and cast lots over the seamless robe?

If we wish, we can easily find means to show our love of this virtue. Thus, to begin with simple rules, let us never waste anything, even thread, or pins, or paper, as some do by beginning letters or resolutions which they never take the trouble to finish. Again, we ought never to wish for more than is necessary; and if we are to practise Poverty as the children follow it, we are to be cheerful even when that which is necessary is not given to us. Or, if we ask a Superior for any book, or furniture, or clothing, and she refuses, it is according to Poverty to be satisfied. Further, when we become Religious we give all that we have to our Order or Institute; and if we feel that it would be a sin to throw away money belonging to the Order, or to destroy its books, what shall we say of those who waste what is still more

precious? And what is more precious? *Time.* All the wealth of England could not purchase five minutes of time—and all work of a Religious House or Order depends upon the use of its time. If a Sister employs her time well, the Order gains in virtue, in learning, in acceptability before God. It is for this reason that the Order takes our time at our Profession, and gives it back to us in scraps and fragments; so much for meals, so much for reading, so much for work; and thus we are taught how valuable time is, when the Order cannot afford to give it all back to us, and is obliged to divide it, as sparingly as a poor father divides a loaf, amongst duties so good and so praiseworthy. Let us, then, employ time well, recollecting those words of St. Paul: 'Redeeming the time, for the days are evil.' *Time* must be redeemed and bought back again, and restored to God, lest our Order should fail, since idleness, or loss of time, is always quoted in Saints' *Lives* as a mark of the

decline of Religious Houses or Orders. Indeed, every act contrary to Poverty weakens our spirit of detachment from self, and renders us unworthy of the Poverty of our Lord, and of His Immaculate Mother. Dear and patient Mother, give us, through Thy prayers, lowliness of spirit and poverty of heart.

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MEDITATION III.

On Mortification.

THE great Apostle of the Gentiles ardently desired to be dissolved and to be with Christ, and his zealous labours and inspired writings were offered to our Blessed Lord that He might be pleased to make all hearts wish and hope to live only in Him. St. Paul deigned to explain that the true Christian, and still more the true Religious, must seek to sacrifice the life which we call

our own in order that we may allow Christ alone to live in us and for us, and that we may be able to say: 'I live; no, not I, but Christ liveth in me.' But how is this happy and holy change to be wrought in us? He replies that if this resurrection is to take place, and if He is to triumph over sin and death in each of us, we must first die. As this death is described as taking place whilst we are as yet on this earth, and before we finally and for ever leave it, it is evident that St. Paul requires a spiritual death, through which, whilst to the eyes of the world we still seem to retain our original life, we have really died to ourselves. As we meditate on this doctrine we must keep always in mind that the spiritual death that is thus recommended must be such as to hide and bury us in Christ, and consequently that our Mortification will be imperfect and incomplete until it has united us to Him on the Cross.

Of all His creatures, no one understood

that life of Mortification so well as our Dear and Immaculate Mother, and may She in Her mercy condescend to unfold the truth to Her children. *Ave Maria.*

Her holy and devoted heart sought ever to dwell in Him, and to sacrifice all Her own feelings for His glory. She chose poverty and humility as Her portion, when She saw how deeply He cherished them in the Stable. She accepted the sword of grief, which holy Simeon announced as Her portion, and through thirty-three years She waited in patient and generous resignation for the hour in which She was to feel the sword during the agony of Her Divine Son on the Cross. Even that suffering did not find Her unprepared, for She had long buried Her heart in Him. When He was only twelve She had felt all the bitterness of being separated from Him. When He began His ministry, and went everywhere working cures and performing other miracles of mercy and grace, She stood apart and did

not claim a mother's share in the praise that was offered to Him. She was not present at His Transfiguration, but She was with Him on Calvary. She came for a moment to the marriage feast of Cana, to teach us the efficacy of prayer; but She did not seek, and does not appear to have received, the thanks of the guests or of the master of the house. She was again present after the Resurrection, when it was necessary to help the Apostles by uniting in their prayer; but as soon as they had received the Holy Ghost, She seemed to walk no longer on the earth, and did not outwardly appear in the results of the graces which Her prayer had drawn down upon their labours. From the first hour She chose the Cross, and to the last moments of Her life the Cross was Her glory. She bequeathed it to Her children in the Religious Orders, in the chapters of their Holy Rule that explain the virtue of Mortification, and She knows the reality of their vocation by their love of it.

For they who are called to the Religious State are to have the exalted honour of being the Spouses of Christ, and they must seek Him where the grace of their vocation was gained for them—at His Cross. He suffered for the Redemption of His creatures, and that for their sake He might make reparation to His Heavenly Father. He cannot die or suffer now; but because sin still continues, He is pleased to commit to His faithful children and spouses the duty of continuing through Him the work of reparation. Their hearts are the branches of the Vine, which is Himself, and when He is weary and thirsty, He comes to gather the grapes that their sufferings, toil, and mortifications have produced. When we read the Lives of the Saints, we find some, like St. Francis, receiving the marks of His Wounds, in order that the most hardened may see how heavy was the ransom paid for their deliverance; we find others, like St. Rose of Lima, choosing the most cruel

mortifications, in order that they might become victims for the ingratitude of sinners; we find others, like St. John of the Cross, cherishing contempt and ill treatment, in order that they might oppose the pride that deprives our Lord of so many souls. But it is impossible to find any Saint whose mortifications have not far exceeded any that we have ever desired to practise. Need we wonder, then, that the deep and real love of our Lord has never been understood by us? When we renew our Vows, we must surely offer ourselves to our Lord Crucified, and we must hope that He will accept our poor homage, not for its own sake, but because of our earnest wish to say with St. Thomas: 'Let us go up likewise and die with Him.'

But when we examine the Lives of the Saints more minutely, we observe that they, whose lives had always been spotless, most of all multiplied their fasts and other mortifications; whilst we are reluctant and slow

in offering to God even as much reparation as our own sins demand. When we think of St. Aloysius weeping for years over one venial sin, we close the book, and dare not think of the readiness with which we excuse all the faults and omissions, wilful and often repeated, that have made our time in Religion unprofitable to us. We live moreover in an age in which want of health or the duties of Class must occasionally render a dispensation from the mortifications prescribed by the Church almost necessary; yet we cannot reach Heaven unless we have been crucified, and if fasting and abstinence are beyond our strength, we must be anxious to supply for them by a cordial spirit of Mortification. As Religious, we are bound to a generous love of penance; as cold and tepid Religious, we have to make amends for our daily acts of neglect of the Sacred Heart of our Lord. Inward acts of Mortification cannot injure our health or weaken our constitution. If a Superior

misunderstands our motives and censures our best actions, will it more resemble our Mother, Mary Immaculate, to receive the humiliation cheerfully, or to justify ourselves? If none of our Sisters seem to love us (and what right have we to expect or wish ourselves to be preferred in their estimation to others?), we must rejoice at their treatment of us. Alas, we are not yet at the foot of Calvary, and we must climb to its summit, bearing reproaches and unfeeling words as we drag our Cross along; and we must be nailed to it, and die upon it, before we can be buried with Christ in God. Take any one of His sufferings, and ask for it, and wait patiently until it comes to you, for you have promised to die with Him. You are afraid to ask for it, and you will therefore leave Him amongst His persecutors, and will not let a single blow fall on yourself rather than on Him. You will not claim the scourging as due to you a poor, vain, wicked, and ungrateful sinner; but

you will glide away, and leave Him to bear those cruel stripes unpitied and alone. You wish to be as much honoured and praised as if you were still in the world and full of its applause; and therefore you cover your head lest one of the thorns should pierce through your pride, and make you understand that there were many thorns in His Crown. You murmur if a Sister seems to be preferred before you, and you forget that He was scorned, and rejected, and despised by all. For your sake His Mother bore the disgrace of seeing Her Son die like a malefactor between two thieves, and She takes your hand and asks you to comfort Her, and share Her bitterness; you have not yet resolved to die to yourself, and to be hidden in Her Son's Tomb; and you mourn and repine because you are allowed to suffer ignominy for His sake.

If we had the real spirit of mortification, we should easily find means to practise this great virtue, without running any risk of

doing half as much as the Holy Rule recommends, still less of needing any advice to moderate our ardour.

We must be crucified; and therefore we must imitate the mortification of Mary.

We must feel for our Lord, and with our Lord, as the Victim of Reparation; and therefore the heart of every true Religious will be an Altar, on which reparation is at all moments offered for the sins of the world.

We are sinners, and have wasted the graces of the interior life to which we were called; and therefore we must make amends for our own omissions and failings.

His Sacred Heart was opened to us by the Lance, and let us dwell always in that home of bitter disappointment and willing suffering endured for us, whose love was so harshly refused to Him, although He had always deserved and earned it.

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MEDITATION IV.

The Obedience of St. Joseph.

THE perfection of every virtue is to be admired in our Lord, and the gifts that appear in His Saints flow from His Sacred Heart, and are surpassed by His own sublime excellence over all of them. But as His justice would overcome us if we looked upon it, and is therefore reflected in Mary, the mirror of Justice, in order that we may contemplate it without being so much dazzled by it, He allows us to consider His obedience in St. Joseph, in order that we may study it without being overawed by its wonderful manifestation in Himself. Dear and Immaculate Mother, adoring the obedience of Jesus, and solicitous to see it imitated by His children, train us

to meditate upon it in the example of St. Joseph. *Ave Maria.*

We have chosen Obedience as the symbol of our consecration to our Lord, and as the standard by which all our sacrifices are to be measured and valued. No one can know our spirit of poverty who does not mark its daily exercise in the outward acts of poverty which our Holy Rule enjoins; no one can be edified by our prayer save by the regularity with which we approach the Holy Communion, or make the visits granted to us through obedience. We have prayed from our infancy that the Will of God might be done on earth as it is in Heaven, and our prayer gains its effect if we are truly obedient, and see only the Will of God in every rule, in every command. Our Lord and His Eternal Father make Their abode in chosen souls, and Their presence is a constant invitation to Obedience. St. Joseph was a just man, and therefore he rendered to God the homage of heroic

obedience. When the voices of the Angels, announcing the Nativity, seem still to be heard, and the Wise Men and their retainers are still visible along the horizon, St. Joseph is called from his sleep and is told to go into Egypt. He does not stay to ask why this command has come so suddenly, and he does not murmur that it must be executed at such an hour. He does not question the wisdom of the order, or try to find excuses for delay. Even anxiety for our Lord is subordinate to his obedience, and although he grieves that he cannot allow Him to sleep till morning, and that he cannot make His first journey more easy, he undertakes it at once. Perhaps they are still disregarded amongst the proud inhabitants of Bethlehem, and their flight will be hailed as a proof that they did not deserve the hospitality that had been refused so harshly. Perhaps they have made a few friends, and they must not stay to bid them farewell. As the head of the family, he must bear

the blame of their disappearance, and he must feel the want of all preparation for the journey. St. Francis of Sales imagines him carrying his tools on his back, that he may, at the first opportunity, earn something for their support. By what way is he to travel? The roads of that Eastern land were infested by robbers, such as the two who afterwards died near the cross of Jesus; and was it more safe to travel amongst them than to try to conceal themselves from the soldiers of Herod? They must travel on through the dark hours of the night, and in the morning they have made such little way, that Bethlehem seems still near, and St. Joseph is alarmed lest his obedience should not have been sufficiently prompt to secure our Lord from His enemies. As the daylight appears, Mary and Joseph kneel and offer their morning prayer to the Divine Infant, and thank Him for condescending to accept their humble service and the affectionate devotion of their hearts. But they are going to Egypt, to the

scenes of sufferings from which their forefathers had been delivered by a succession of miracles, to the territory in which idolatry and superstition hold undisputed sway, and where the name so dear to them, the thrice holy name of God, is always blasphemed. Surely, they may stay near its boundary, for they are now in safety, but Joseph hastens onwards because the command is yet unfulfilled. They have walked many a mile, and are weary, and yet their repose must be brief. The inspired writer loves to describe the beautiful landscapes of Egypt, with the streams of water flowing through the fertile plains; but St. Joseph felt that obedience was more pleasing to our Lord, Whose hands had created the trees, and the fields, and the crystal water, and he did not linger to admire them. In singleness of heart, in cheerful conformity with the Divine Will, he will not rest until all has been accomplished. It is hard to ask the way and find no one who will answer their question, or even to under-

stand their language. It is trying to St. Joseph to see that even the shelter of Bethlehem would be welcome to Mary, and that no shelter is given to Her and to Her Divine Son.

But the journey was undertaken in obedience, and St. Joseph accepts all the sacrifices that obedience claims or suggests.

When his ancestors were in captivity, they hung their harps on the trees and sat and wept when they remembered Sion. St. Joseph thinks of the holy mount, and of the courts of the Temple where his relative Zachary was wont to offer the sacrifice; but his obedience checks the thought of grief. The years of exile are slow, and the pilgrim looks to the time that has passed since he left his own land and sighs for his return; but St. Joseph has been told to remain in Egypt until the Angel calls him, and he does not murmur because his exile is prolonged. When the message comes, he will arise and will begin his journey by day or by night,

although his return to Israel is not destined to be cheerful; for when he hears that Archelaus is reigning instead of his brother Herod, he is filled with fear, and does not venture to return to their beloved Judea. Again, he receives the command to go to Galilee, and with the same readiness which he has always shown, he obeys it.

Whilst the obedience of St. Joseph was so complete, so true, so perfect, he considered that far above it soared the wonderful obedience of Mary, whose whole life had been a succession of sacrifices nobly made and heroically offered; and again, that Her obedience only imitated, but did not by an infinite distance reach, the obedience of our Divine Lord. In the tenderness of infancy, when He was taken into Egypt, He understood and felt all the anxiety and sorrow of the journey, and thought only of the words: 'In the beginning of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will; My God, I have wished it and Thy law in the middle

of My heart.' (Ps. xxxix. 8.) Sad to Him and gloomy were the Temples of Egypt, but obedience kept Him in their land. Whether the years of His exile were five or more, or fewer, He knew and shared, in silence, the sufferings of our Lady and St. Joseph, and repeating the words: 'The things that are pleasing to My Father I do always,' He did not lessen the merit of His obedience by a momentary wish that the time might pass quickly, and that their return might be hastened. Every year added to the admiration of His parents when they beheld His obedience; and after twelve it became still more sublime, for it was thenceforth such as could be described only by the words: 'He went down to Nazareth, and was *subject to them.*' St. Joseph did not live to see this subjection towards Mary and himself exalted by His obedience to His enemies and persecutors during His Passion, of which St. Paul says: 'He learned obedience in the things which He suffered.' (Heb. v. 8.) Mary

saw that this virtue was so dear to Him that He perpetuated it and made it palpable to the whole Church, when He communicated to His priests, however unworthy they might be, the power to command Him to descend upon the Altar, and to renew the Sacrifice of the New Law, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.

Under the shadow of this majestic obedience we dwell always, and are sheltered from every trouble, because He remains in the Tabernacle to guard and bless us. Near His throne, in our own Chapel, He is adored by the whole Heavenly Court. Amongst the Saints St. Joseph appears and tells us to study and acquire the spirit of real, sincere, childlike obedience, and to ask for an increase of it at every visit, at every Mass, and in every Communion. 'Henceforth, my children,' he says, 'do not hesitate when the voice of obedience, the sweetest of all voices, for it is our Lord Himself speaking, bids you to depart or to return. Do not plead

that duties are too difficult, for you will be rewarded for your good will, and not for your success alone. Do not murmur, for cheerful submission is most welcome to Him. Do not ask for rest, for the time that remains before nightfall is very short, and your work, the work entrusted to you by your Heavenly Spouse, must be accomplished. Listen attentively to our Lord's words, for He will speak in peaceful inspirations if you are an obedient and willing listener. He will speak to you in the orders of your Superior, if you promise never to find them hard or irksome. He will speak to you in the quiet and earnest words of the Holy Rule, if you will consider that its words are blessed, for His Vicar on earth has adopted and sealed and crowned them.'

Dear and Immaculate Mother, thank and adore our Lord for His goodness to St. Joseph, and let his obedience be our model, our delight, when we are invited to renew our consecration to the Sacred Heart of our

Divine Saviour, and to receive the title of daughters of Religious Obedience.

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MEDITATION V.

The Death of St. Joseph.

WHEN we are attending the sick, it is our duty to speak to them of the compassion of St. Joseph towards the dying. We have often been cheered by the brightness that has lighted up their countenance when his sweet name was uttered. We hope that when our own day comes, it may please God, in His Infinite mercy, to inspire our attendants with the thought of repeating the invocation of St. Joseph, as our support in the anguish and struggles of that final battle.

O Immaculate Mother, for the sake of Thy love for our souls, speak to us of the

death of St. Joseph, and teach us how to love and imitate him. *Ave Maria.*

The peaceful life of Nazareth was drawing to a close, and the time was at hand when that holy home, the type of religious communities, was to witness its first death. The Immaculate Heart of Mary was filled with grief as often as She noticed that St. Joseph was unequal to his daily labour, and that Her Son claimed the heavier work as His own share. She had watched him praying before the daylight allowed him to begin his toil, but a morning came on which she missed him at the accustomed hour. When the sun rose, and he had not opened the lattice, She prepared their repast in sadness. From their usual means of support the earnings of one were wanting, and there was little wherewith to make any provision of such food as he could take. He who was to smoothe many a sick bed, and to soothe many an aching heart, had slept on the ground during the Flight into Egypt. He

had not grown richer since that time, and had not wished to make his last couch softer than the manger of Bethlehem. As the day advances, he makes another effort to rise; and as he sinks down exhausted, his lips continue to move in prayer. Does his weakness warn him that the last dispensation of the Adorable Will of God is beginning; or has the Angel, who has borne so many messages to him, been privileged to announce that his pilgrimage is ending, and that he must make another journey? He trims his lamp and keeps his soul in his hands, that he may be ready when the bridegroom knocks in the deep midnight. He has cherished silence, and he will not interrupt it to ask the hour or the manner of his departure. The heroic faith, that has never wavered in its confidence, is more wonderful than ever. The hope, that made him just before the Holy Ghost, when he had heard only the promises of the Old Law, has increased through our

Lord's gifts in its force and power. The ardent charity, that had glowed when the head of Jesus was resting on his heart, multiplies its offerings and its earnest aspirations of affection and gratitude. His soul magnifies the Lord, Who has done such great things for him; and he repeats the sacred name of Jesus, which has been sweeter and more sweet every time he has pronounced it during the last thirty years. Our loving Lord, the Sun of Justice, cannot reward St. Joseph save according to the measure of the virtues which he had practised in life, and therefore He helps him to add to the intensity and fervour of his acts of the virtues for which He desires to crown him. Mary prays by his bedside, whilst Jesus supports his head, telling him the while that obedience is most perfect in death preceded by much suffering, since it was to be afterwards said: 'Christ was made obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross.' The obedience of St.

Joseph had grown as he studied hour after hour the example of Him Who 'went down to Nazareth and was subject to them.' It strengthened him when he was weeping during the three days of our Lord's absence, which anticipated for him the three days' desolation after the Crucifixion. It strengthens him when he is leaving the all-holy and consoling presence of Jesus, to dwell for three years in Limbo, and to long, with the ancient patriarchs, for His descent amongst them. He is obedient when he is told to live on and languish in sickness; he is obedient when he is summoned to go away. His eyes grow bright when he adores Jesus for His Mercies, and when he thanks Mary for Her kindness, and bowing his head he yields his soul in peace.

Jesus speaks not and seems for a moment to slumber, for the Soul of St. Joseph, freed from the prison of this body, stands in that lowly cottage before Him seated, as Man, on His throne of judgment; for 'as the

Father hath life in Himself, so He hath given to the Son also to have life in Himself, and He hath given Him power to do judgment *because* He is the Son of man.' (S. John v. 26.) Before Mary has closed his eyes, St. Joseph has heard the happy sentence: 'The faithful man shall be much praised, and he who is the guardian of his Lord shall be glorified' (Prov. xxviii. *Office of St. Joseph*),—and has received, in addition to his other trophies, the guardianship of purity and charity and of the poor; the care of children and of the aged; the care of the Religious and Clergy who teach them or watch over them; and the care of the dying. Perhaps St. John Baptist came from his wilderness to console our Dear and Immaculate Mother in Her grief, as Jesus was to come to weep with Martha and Mary, and perhaps he perceived the unearthly odour of the sanctity which the Angels drew from the Lily that had always been fresh in St. Joseph's hand. Perhaps our Lord will

shorten the time of His stay on the earth in order that His Ascension may come the sooner, and that He may take even the body as well as the Soul of St. Joseph to witness the glory of His Victory and the majesty of His Reign. (St. Francis of Sales.) Dear St. Joseph, we have often felt thy goodness and we rejoice in thy triumph; and we beseech thee to bless us in our vows, and to sustain us in our agony and in our passage from life.

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MEDITATION VI.

Our Immaculate Mother of Mercy.

IT is related in the Lessons of St. Felix of Valois, that once on Christmas Eve, when he alone of the Community awoke for Matins, he found our Blessed Mother in the Choir wearing a habit marked with the red-

and-blue cross of the Order to which he belonged, and he beheld many inhabitants of our heavenly home wearing a similar habit. When St. Veronica Juliani was allowed to contemplate a vision of Heaven, she was for a time attired in rich robes, and afterwards discovered that at the moment of her chief happiness she was wearing only the habit of her own Order. Since the habit is held in such honour before God, we cannot displease our Immaculate Mother, from whom our own simple Order has received such signal favours, by meditating on Her as the Mother of Mercy.

May She condescend to explain how the mysteries of Her life make Her our guide and example. *Ave Maria.*

Our Dear Mother was in Her earthly life a Sister of Mercy, and therefore She is now your Mother, and will enable you to imitate Her example.

She went as a Sister of Mercy to visit St. Elizabeth, forgetting the high dignity to

which the Annunciation had raised Her, and disregarding the pain and toil of the journey to the mountains. We may imagine how devout and fervent were Her meditations as she went on Her way. When She reached the house of St. Elizabeth, their thoughts and words were such as yours must be in the houses of the poor whom you visit,—of gratitude to God, and of affection for His mercies.

She went about begging a lodging in Bethlehem, just as you must for Her sake follow Her poverty, suffer discomforts in your house, and when your poor need a shelter and a home, you must go from door to door to beg it for them. If your Convent is lowly and simple, what matter since He, Who shed glory over the Stable, chooses it for the home of Himself, and of the children in whom He lives?

She went to the Temple to present our Divine Lord and to offer for Him the gifts of the poor, as a Sister of Mercy visiting the

sick for His sake must be willing and happy to take such offerings as, in the true spirit of poverty, her Convent may be able to afford. Twelve years later, She was again in the Temple after She had, together with St. Joseph, for three days sought Him sorrowing; and the Sister of Mercy must grieve when His children come not to their home in the Convent School, and must go to the foot of the Altar to pray and weep for their return. About the age of twelve, our children make their First Communion, and we must entreat Him with sighs and earnest prayer, that He would be pleased to unite their hearts with His own and make them, even at that age, full of zeal, affection, and charity for Him Who is preparing such glory for them. At a later time, when She heard, as we may naturally believe, how tenderly He had said, 'Consider the lilies of the field,' how much would She long to preserve the souls of children white and fragrant as lilies in His garden! For their

sake She raised up the Sisters of the Orders that are devoted to the education of children.

She was at the marriage-feast of Cana begging for wine for the guests, as a Sister of Mercy must from time to time look for the means of doing good to the rich, and must at Christmas or other times teach the children to be cheerful.

She was a Sister of Mercy when She was with our dear Lord under the Cross, and when She prayed by Him when He was dying. Her prayer under the Cross must send us light how to stand by the bed of the dying, and how to comfort them for the love of Jesus.

She was a Sister of Mercy when She laid Him in the tomb, and saw that, after all His sufferings, His resting-place was prepared for Him.

She was a Sister of Mercy in the Retreat of the three days, during which He was in the tomb, and in the Retreat of the ten days,

when She was praying with the Apostles for the coming of the Holy Ghost.

She was a Sister of Mercy during the twelve years after His Ascension, when She waited in patience, and in complete union with His adorable will, for the day of Her passage to His Kingdom.

It is piously believed, that during these twelve years She often went along the stations of the sorrowful way from the Hall of Pilate to Calvary, which the devotion of the faithful love to visit. How much would She weep at the spot where He had first seen Her, His own dear Mother, as He struggled under the weight of the Cross! What thoughts filled Her Immaculate Heart when She heard Him speaking with such pity to the daughters of Jerusalem for their own sake, and the sake of their children; and longed for true daughters of Jerusalem, who were to seek the souls of children, and were to guard them and guide their steps to His fold! And is not our Dear Mother

a Mother of Mercy still, in Her motherly compassion for the Holy Souls; and when She guards our houses, and even from Her Heavenly Throne blesses us if She finds us faithful to Her example, and anxious to remain always in the Sacred Heart of Her Divine Son! O Blessed Mother, teach us to consecrate this Retreat and all our lives to His Service, and to be unsparing and generous in the sacrifices that He deigns to accept from us!

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MEDITATION VII.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus.

DURING our Retreat our thoughts must have been directed towards Her Immaculate Heart, and we may have been led to consider the feelings by which She was moved and guided. At such times we have

understood that the first and the deepest of those feelings was Her desire to study the Sacred Heart of Her Divine Son, to follow His aspirations for the Glory of His Heavenly Father, and to imitate His affectionate zeal for the salvation of His children. Let us beseech Her to speak to us of His Sacred Heart, as He appeared to Her thoughts. *Ave Maria.*

If the Psalmist found that the fire of love was enkindled in his soul as he meditated upon the mysteries of Grace (Ps. xxxviii. 41), we do not wonder that Mary was filled with rapturous admiration when She spoke of the Sacred Heart, the most wonderful and most noble of all those Mysteries, and when She exclaimed: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord.' She beheld Him the first and the last (Apoc. xxii.), the first born of all creatures (Coloss. i.), for Whom all men were made,—'Ye are of Christ.' (1 Cor. iii.) She saw in Him the likeness of God in all its perfection, since the Word is the image

of His goodness. (Wisdom vii.) To Her eyes all the attributes of the Divinity were depicted in His Heart, and He was therefore 'the High Priest, whom it was fitting we should have holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners.' (Heb. vii. 26.) Through the Incarnate Word a fresh light of the brightness of His Father shone upon Her, and when She saw God visibly, She was raised to the love of His invisible glories. Her soul overflowed with delight, 'and Her spirit rejoiced in God Her Saviour.' She dwelt for thirty years in the contemplation of the holiness and purity of His Sacred Heart, and treasured in Her own Heart the words that announced that 'mindful of His Mercy' and of His promises He had come, in meekness and humility, to seek the salvation of His creatures. Already She had heard the Sacred Heart saying: 'Come all to Me.' (St. Matt. xi. 28.)

'How beautiful are these words!' says St. Basil of Seleucia: 'Come to Me all: I

place no bounds to My promises; My Heart is an inexhaustible source of goodness; it can wash away every crime.

'Come to Me all, and I will refresh you. The crimes are yours; the remedy is Mine; yours are the wounds, Mine the cure.

'Come to Me all; My Heart is wide enough for all. The ocean of My mercy is vast enough to receive all sinners, who cast themselves therein, like rivers, to drown their offences in its waves.

'Come to Me all; for My word cannot remain without effect. It is a net-work, which I have cast into the sea of the world, to take and enclose all mankind.

'Come to Me all; ah! what power is there in these words, which have triumphed over all the nations of the world! what saving, sovereign efficacy, which has bowed the universe in obedience to the yoke of faith! (*Nouet.*)

'*Venite ad me omnes.* Come to Me all; come all to My Heart. Come, children, to

the Heart of Jesus; never did the most loving mother feel anything that approaches the tenderness with which this Heart burns for you. Come, ye aged, to the Heart of Jesus; He will renew your youth like the eagle's. Come, ye just, to the Heart of Jesus; secure within this retreat, you shall advance each day from virtue to virtue. Come, sinners, come all to the Heart of Jesus, and the robe of your iniquities, were it red as scarlet, shall be made as white as snow.' (*Manual of the S. Heart.*)

But whilst the Sacred Heart was compassionate to those who had offended Him, Mary knew how tenderly He loved those who were still in the innocence of childhood. She saw the Beloved feeding on the lilies, and gathering around Him spotless souls, like St. John, who were dear to Him on account of their simplicity and purity. She heard the beatings of that Heart, even when He seemed to sleep, watchful on account of His desire that His children should always

be faithful to these angelic virtues. She saw Him clothing them with the white robe in Baptism, that they might bear it unstained through life.

Blessed is the lot of His Priests, who are allowed to present to the Sacred Heart souls washed in the purifying waters of this holy Sacrament, and fragrant with the innocence which it imparts! Blessed again are His Priests, who are allowed to nurture these fair flowers, and to adorn them with virtues which may prepare them for the religious state, and to dwell, with Mary, in the courts of the Temple! Blessed are His Priests, who instil into the candid and open hearts of children lessons of faith and holiness, which remain as their chief and only treasure through life! And thrice blessed are His Priests and faithful disciples, who in these degenerate days have, by their words, and still more by their example, encouraged our brethren in the distant East to bear away the palm and crown of martyrdom!

Who can imagine their sufferings in loathsome dungeons, their anxious prayers for the confirming gift of fortitude, their ardent love of our Crucified Lord, their generous eagerness to bear, with Simon of Cyrene, His Cross! Think of the Christians, bereft of their martyred priests and bishops, meeting in upper chambers and dark caverns, and cheering one another to hope for better days and to be steadfast in the faith, and full of confidence in the prayers of our Immaculate Mother, and in the all-powerful graces of the Sacred Heart of Him for Whom they are fighting the good fight, and from Whom they are to receive an unfading crown of glory. We know that the Church is rejoicing even now in the victories of martyrs and confessors, and that by the Communion of Saints we are sharing in their victories. Blessed, then, are they who have instructed them and others unto justice, for they shall shine like stars evermore!

When we are summoned by the Church

to meditate on the mysterious love that fills the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we hear Him repeating that aspiration, 'I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?' (S. Luc. xii. 49.) Would that we were able to feel the way in which He seeks to scatter this fire amongst us! Day after day it burns in the Adorable Sacrifice, wherein the fruits of His Passion are applied to our souls. It cannot consume itself, and therefore it lingers, bright and unquenchable, in the Tabernacle, whence He comes forth to claim a resting-place in the hearts of His friends. He longs for the time when they are to return to receive and welcome Him, and if they tarry, His Angels are sent into the highways that they may compel all to enter, and that His feast may be full. If sickness keeps us away, He hastens to our bedside that we may know how tenderly He thinks of us! But how mournful and saddening to His affectionate heart must be His passage from His altar

to the lowly chamber or perhaps the prison cell to which He carries that holy fire! As He passes along our streets, no hosanna gladdens His ear, no palm branches are strewed on His way. The ways of Sion mourn, for there is no one to come to the festival, and to hail His approach. His minister bears in silent adoration, anxiously avoiding the notice of the multitude, that Divine Lord Who claims the allegiance of all around Him. His Sacred Heart yearns with compassion towards them, and they are unmindful of the love with which He wishes to inflame them. He sees the Churches, where of old He dwelt, cold and desolate, and bereft of the treasure of His Eucharistic Majesty, which was once their glory. He sees many of His creatures misled by unbelief and error, and blinded by prejudices. But, O, how eagerly does He wrestle with them that they may refuse, like the Patriarch, to allow Him to depart before He has blessed them! Poor as they

are, they are dear to Him, and He longs to enrich them with the gifts prepared by His love; wretched as they are on account of their sins, He wishes to render them happy; ignorant as they are because they disown the teaching of His Church, He wishes to instruct and guide them to her threshold, that entering they may see the light, and may no longer walk in darkness. He has allowed sickness to afflict the family to whom He is journeying, that He may pass through the crowded streets of our cities, and through the green fields of the rural missions, and gaze, unseen, upon the sheep that He desires to gather into His fold. If such are His feelings towards those who disregard His presence, who can tell the pain and the suffering with which He witnesses on His way the gloomy state of those Catholics who for years and years have been separated from Him? Over their hearts, likewise, hard and dead as they are, He would fain scatter the sparks of that enlivening fire that alone can

quicken them into life. Over that earth which is beaten down and frozen, He Who is the lily of the valley would cause that flower of fragrant innocence once more to appear. Over those souls, so long buried under the deep waters of wickedness and sin, His Immaculate Mother, who is fair as the dove, would again bear the olive branch, and those waters would again subside. Into those souls, so long deaf to the sweetness of His voice, would the soothing tones of His mercy be poured. And thus as He passes does the Sacred Heart ever repeat: 'I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?'

They who are gray and aged will not listen as He asks them to love Him before they are called away; they who are busy with the pursuit of gain will not stay with Him, and then we hear Him say: 'Suffer little children to come to Me and prevent them not, for of such is the Kingdom of

Heaven.' But where are they, the simple-minded and single-hearted, whom Jesus loves most of all? Where are the little ones over whom His Angels are watching so constantly, and upon whom they are so ambitious, for His sake, to wait?

He looks for them, and wishes to kindle His fire in their hearts. He knows the early craving of their affection for Him, and His Religious are sent to call them around Him.

Let us feel for these children, and let us feel for their Heavenly Father, Who wishes to endow them, because they are poor and because they are children, and His poor and His children, with the treasures of His boundless love. May they and all of us dwell ever in the thrice holy home of His Sacred Heart!

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MEDITATION VIII.

The Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament.

HOW wonderful is the goodness of our Dear and Immaculate Mother in having condescended to obtain for us the happiness of having Her Divine Son in our house, and the honour of being able to come often into His Holy presence! Blessed and Merciful Mother, teach us to be grateful to Thee, and always full of the desire to know how to adore and love Him in our visits. *Ave Maria.*

At the Nativity, the Angels rejoiced because, for the first time since the creation of the world, it had been granted to us to offer real and welcome adoration to our Heavenly Father; *Gloria in excelsis Deo.* From all eternity God had desired and sought His own glory, and when He created

man, He claimed praise, homage, and adoration from him. 'Man was created,' says St. Ignatius, 'to the end that he might love, and serve, and adore the Lord his God.' Even before original Sin had weakened the power of loving God, our first parents knew that they could not offer due and complete honour to Him; and after their fall, they and all their children sighed and longed for the Messiah, Who was to exalt their acts of love and respect, and to teach them to look up with reverence and filial awe to our Father, Who is in Heaven. When the law was given on Mount Sinai, its first commandment claimed adoration for Him; when the ceremonies and sacrifices of the law were defined, He spread glory around the Holy of Holies, that His people might offer many holocausts and acts of supreme worship to Him. When Mary was conceived without original sin, Her homage was more pleasing to Him than the united love of all His Angels and all man-

kind. But She prayed that the footsteps of the Beloved One might appear on the eternal hills, in order that perfect love, perfect honour, perfect offerings, and a clear oblation might rise before His throne from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. Her soul magnified the Lord, and Her spirit exalted in God Her Saviour; and She felt the meaning of the gladness of the Angels when they announced to the Shepherds that the hour was come in which true glory could be given to God in the highest. The Scripture has hidden from our eyes the visit of our Immaculate Mother and St. Joseph when their adoration was blessed and consecrated by being united with the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for His Eternal Father. We are allowed to visit the Blessed Sacrament, in order that the acts of adoration inspired in the Mass each morning may be renewed and developed during the day. Let it be, therefore, one of

our resolutions, during the Retreat, to ask often for the spirit of awe, reverence, and adoration, and for the favour of being invited to unite our service with the profound love and homage of Mary and Joseph as they kneel at the manger.

At our second visit, we shall find the Shepherds, and they will remind us that we are not to be troubled because words fail us, and because we cannot suitably express our intense admiration and affection for our Infant Saviour. From them we shall hear that He seeks singleness of heart and simplicity of mind in His favourites: 'Dost thou know My servant Job,' said the Lord, 'a man simple and upright and fearing God?' If we fall at His feet and forget ourselves, and think only of His greatness, our child-like silence and our child-like half-formed words will be as pleasing to Him as were the untaught words of the Shepherds. Alas, how much we have lost in the last twelvemonth, especially in prayer

and in the Holy Communion and in our visits, because we have not cherished religious simplicity!

At our third visit, we shall find Mary and Joseph preparing for their journey to the Temple. See how their hearts, never detached from His Adorable Heart, are overcome with wonder and are buried in meditation when they contemplate the near approach of the moment upon which the hearts of all the ancient patriarchs had been concentrated, and towards which the sacrifices of the holy sons of Levi had turned; the moment in which, for the first time, God was to receive adequate honour, love, and adoration; 'and presently the Lord Whom you seek, and the Angel of the Testament Whom you desire, shall come to His temple. Behold He cometh, saith the Lord of Hosts. And the sacrifice of Juda and of Jerusalem shall please the Lord as in the days of old, and in the ancient years.' (Malachi iii. 1, 4.) Our Immaculate Mother

takes us by the hand and tells us that our adoration must be like Her own, and that when we visit Him, we must offer the turtle doves, emblems of the simplicity which we promised at our last visit, emblems of the poverty and of the perfect obedience of which we are about to renew the vows. When we know not how to pray before the Most Blessed Sacrament, let us consecrate our hearts by obedience and poverty, and our homage will be readily offered by His Dear Mother and St. Joseph to Him.

At our fourth visit, we shall be ashamed to enter the Chapel, for we shall find the Wise Men, who have not come from the next cell, but who have obeyed the silent warning of the Star (how much God delights in guiding and instructing through silence!), and have travelled from their homes and their kingdoms to have the happiness, once only in their lives, of bowing down before our Infant Lord. If we are high in our pride and in our thoughts

of our own position, talents, or gifts, we must humble ourselves and bend our heads to the ground, and hear their ardent entreaties that He would be pleased to accept their allegiance and their fealty, and that He would condescend to bless their hearts in order that their offerings may be less unworthy of Him. They have brought the gold of charity which He desires to receive at our hands; the myrrh of mortification of which He loves the fragrance; and the frankincense of adoration which He alone can render perfect; and as they place their gifts before His Dear Mother, and ask Her to present them, they feel that their visit will please Him only if their souls are filled with grief on account of their sins: 'A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.' (Ps. l. 19.) Surely, when our other gifts fail, our homage must naturally consist of contrition and sorrow for our sins.

At our fifth visit, we shall find Mary and Joseph in tears at the door of the Temple, and if we enter with them, they will make us understand that whenever we have found our heart desolate, and our home cheerless, it was time to weep and moan until we could again approach Jesus. They will reproach us with the Communions that we have allowed ourselves, through timidity or disobedience, to omit; with the visits which, from sloth or a preference for outward duties, we have forfeited; with the Masses from which the children, through our want of zeal and firmness, have been absent. Sadly and mournfully we must make reparation for these sins that He, a meek and uncomplaining prisoner in our Tabernacle, has been obliged to witness in His own community, and we must bid our tears to flow, because they have never been allowed to flow before.

Dear and Immaculate Mother, we en-

treat Thee to obtain, for the sake of St. Joseph, that in the renewal of our vows one of our chief thoughts may be devotion in our visits to Thy Divine Son, reposing on the Altar which He allows us to dress and adorn for Him.

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MEDITATION IX.

Preparation for Holy Communion.

WHILST we are seeking the privilege of renewing our vows, we must examine and ascertain what has been wanting during the past year to render our hearts really pleasing to Him Who deigns to accept the vows from our unworthiness. Nothing has been wanting on His part, and His Immaculate Mother has never hesitated to help us to deserve His love. He has never failed to return to us, although He has so often been distressed by the coldness of His re-

ception, and disappointed by our vain promises of becoming more spiritual and more devoted to His Sacred Heart. How often has our Good Angel endeavoured to make us afraid of our scanty hospitality, and of the heartlessness with which we have denied Him a home or even a shelter! How often has he repeated the words of the Prophet: 'O Expectation of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble: why wilt Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man turning in to lodge?' (Jeremiah xiv. 8.)

Dearest and Immaculate Mother, mourning over the cruelty of the inhabitants of Bethlehem when they refused Him room in their houses, teach me to weep over my past neglect, and henceforth to prepare my soul for His coming in the Holy Communion. *Ave Maria.*

My first preparation may be taken from the life of St. Paul, whose eyes were closed to the outer world as soon as he had heard

the voice of our Lord, and had been invited to be His servant. Until I learn to forget external cares and to close my heart until He comes to claim it again, I shall always have reason to regret that my Communions have vanished before I have become aware of His presence. It is written in the Gospel, 'Jesus, passing through the midst of them, went His way' (S. Luke iv. 30), and St. Augustine says that he trembled whenever he reflected that Jesus does not tarry, but is passing away from the souls that have not prepared a resting-place and a welcome for Him. In the Religious Orders there are devout and holy souls who watch and pray for His return, and who will not be comforted until they hear His footsteps again. When they enter the class they look for Him living, according to His promise, in each child, and they are full of zeal and devoted interest in her soul in order that He may accept these acts of charity as an earnest entreaty that He would hasten His

return. When they go to the sick, they remember how St. Camillus de Lellis felt His presence most deeply amongst those whom He was pleased to visit with sickness and in whom He was dwelling; they will, like that great model of Sisters of Mercy, pray fervently by their bedside and beg for forgiveness and the grace of being accepted by Him. When they come back to the Convent, they will knock at the gate and ask Him to open it, that they may find Him again in His own house, and that they may not be rejected as not having on the wedding garment. When they begin their meals, they will repeat with the earnest faith of the Church: 'May the King of Eternal Glory make us partakers of the heavenly banquet. *Mensæ cœlestis participes nos faciat Rex æternæ gloriæ.*' They will rejoice in the silence of the table, that they may think of the bread of Angels, of which their daily bread is the constant promise, since their Father, Who gave manna to His people in

the desert, intended it as a type of the living manna of His flesh and blood in the New Law. Thus, every work ought to guide me in my preparation for His coming, and ought to suggest and favour acts of desire and of longing for Him.

Whilst other Christians need books and other means to help them to think of the happiness that awaits them, a Sister of Mercy is ever reminded of the joy of her First Communion, and of the duty of feeling that her anticipations of increasing happiness ought to be strengthened by each Communion. To her is given the holy duty of training children to understand the force and meaning of the words: 'Thou hast given them bread from heaven, having in it every sweetness;' to her is given the welcome charge of enkindling in souls long dead the fire of Divine love, and of reviving their hope of receiving Him once more before their departure. Her own soul ought to be moved by the simple aspirations and

the affectionate eagerness of the children, and by the tears of the dying when they think of Jesus, and the ardent gladness of her First Communion ought never to be allowed to diminish. How much I thought before that Communion, when I was in the freshness and innocence of childhood; how little do I think of my approaching Communion, although each of them is a memorial of the patience and condescension of my Saviour!

When the morning comes of the day that is to be hallowed by the visit of my dear Lord and Father, I ought to tremble with anxiety lest anything should delay it or render me unworthy of such an honour. Once, when St. Philip Neri was to receive the Holy Communion in his cell, and his companion did not come as soon as midnight was over, he exclaimed: 'Ah, father, you little know how sweet Jesus is, or you would not keep me waiting for Him.' Every hour ought to appear long and wearisome whilst

I am deprived of Him, and yet many hours ought to appear too short for the preparation that He deserves at my hands. The considerations and the promises and resolutions of my meditation ought all to be inspired by the thought that my Communion is near; the lessons of my meditation ought to seem to come direct from the Tabernacle, and to fix my mind and my soul upon Him Who has made it His abode.

The Mass has begun, and He has entered the Garden of Olives. Deep and intense is His anguish because I have fallen asleep, and have not been able to watch one little hour with Him. The precious moments are rapidly passing, and the tremendous sacrifice will soon be accomplished. The Lamb has been slain and yet is standing alive upon the Altar, for He prolongs His life in order that He may bestow Himself on me. His Angels are singing, 'Come, Spouse of Christ,' and I am unmoved by the strains of their thrilling harmony. His Immaculate Mother has pre-

pared a robe adorned with the jewels of faith and hope and charity and adoration. Although I have wandered like the Prodigal Son from the home of the interior and hidden life of the Holy Family, She will clothe me with that splendid robe, and Her Divine Son will take the ring from His finger and give it to me if I am willing to sit down at His feast. My dear St. Joseph prepared a home for Him in a wet stable, and another in the idolatrous land of Egypt, and another in ungrateful Galilee, and may He deign to destroy the idols of my self-love, and prepare a home for Him even in the cheerless recesses of my ungrateful and unfeeling heart. With the renewal of my vows, let me offer a sincere and genuine determination to make my future preparation for each Communion complete, by cultivating in myself habitually the spirit of recollection, and by making every visit a fresh act of supplication for grace, and for the gift of true affection to Him.

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MEDITATION X.

Thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

GRATITUDE must surely be very pleasing to our Dear Lord, since He has chosen to make it one of the ends of the supreme act of sacrifice, and the usual title of the Divine Sacrament of His Love. In every Mass we are taught to thank Him, when we chaunt the ever-enduring song of the Angels before the Canon, and often in the Mass we think of the thanksgiving which the Angels carry before His throne: *Gratias agimus Tibi propter magnam gloriam Tuam.* Dear and Immaculate Mother, condescend to offer our humble thanks to Him after each Communion, and make us feel the Infinite Goodness that has brought Him to our poor hearts. *Ave Maria.*

My Good Saviour did not need the Holy Communion because of the effect which

others gain therefrom, but He felt a wonderful sweetness from the institution of the Most Blessed Eucharist as soon as it was completed, and wishing to confirm every command by obeying it, He received the First Communion: 'With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.' (S. Luke xxii. 15, explained by St. Jerome and St. Thomas.) As the Apostles fell on their knees and adored Him, I devoutly prostrate myself before Thee, and ask Thee to accept the ineffable delight of Thy own Communion as my best and truest thanksgiving for the mercy which has brought Thee to me this morning. The Sun, created by Thee, will shine over many a home, but it will shine upon none so joyous, so peaceful, and so happy as our Convent Chapel, where Thou hast feasted with my sisters and myself, and hast caused us to know Thee, as the two disciples at Emmaus knew Thee, in the breaking of bread.

When Thou hadst left this earth to return to Thy Eternal Father, the Church would have been dissolved if the Blessed Eucharist had not remained to sustain her life and increase her strength; but it pleased Thee to prevent us from feeling that we were orphans, for Thy own Beloved and Immaculate Mother showed, by Her example, that it was Thy wish that the faithful should receive Thee daily, and each day with increasing affection. I humbly ask Her to offer to Thy Sacred Heart the undying fragrance of Her Communions, and to obtain that my sisters and myself may be at Her feet when She is blessing and adoring Thee for them.

Thou hast deigned to come to me more frequently than Thou visitest others, only because I am a sister of a Religious Institute. Therefore I offer to Thee Thy happiness when sinners were called to repentance by Thy voice, and I ask Thee to allow my gratitude to be expressed when I perform

the first work of spiritual mercy by praying for the conversion of sinners, and by telling them of Thy compassion to the publican in the Temple, and to the Prodigal Son; and of Thy kindness in seeking the Lost Sheep and carrying it home on the shoulders, which so meekly bore the Cross afterwards, to Thy Father's house. I will not rest when sinners are to be gained, hoping that their return home may make some amends for the coldness of my Communion.

When the disciples could not understand Thy parables and other passages of Thy teaching, it was Thy joy to instruct their ignorance; and I unite all my lessons in class with Thy instructions, and I promise to become every hour more patient, more simple, and more earnest in explaining the doctrines of Thy Church to the poor, especially if I find them unpromising, dull, and careless; in order that this second work of mercy may thank Thee for my Communion.

When one was doubtful about his voca-

tion, Thy words and Thy example told him to give all that he had to the poor and to follow the way of perfection. (St. Matt. xix. 21.) And when I find souls anxious, troubled, and timid, I will counsel them in their doubts, and guide them to Thy pastures, where they will find peace. Whilst each of them listens to the advice which Thy fatherly goodness will inspire, let my work be accepted as a devout homage in return for my Communion.

Some will be in sorrow, and I shall remember Thee stopping the funeral procession near the city gate, and giving life to the son and gladness to his widowed mother. Nor can I ever forget that, in order to dry our tears, Thou hast sent the Comforter, the Paraclete, to dwell always in the Church. Bestow, then, on me constant zeal in comforting the sorrowful, and a desire to imitate Thee in the work of mercy, that all my efforts may be an acknowledgment of Thy goodness in comforting us through the Holy Communion.

Sometimes it will be our lot to speak of Thee carrying the Cross and falling under the weight of our sins, in order that we may induce our poor, young and old, to bear patiently the wrongs which they suffer. And at such times may my persuasion, my entreaties, my prayers prove to Thee, meek and humble of Heart, how much I feel the patience that makes Thee bear with all the wrongs that I have made Thee endure in the Holy Communion.

Often I shall have to speak to our children of St. Stephen praying, after Thy example, for his persecutors, and generously forgiving them; and when I tell them that Thy justice yields always to Thy mercy whenever we forgive one another, 'forgive and ye shall be forgiven' (S. Luke vi. 37), let my ardent and persevering wish to cause all within and without our community to live in charity, union, and forgiveness be welcome to Thee, to Whose prayer on the Cross we owe our existence. May my sin-

cere determination to forgive every one, and my endeavours to pour out a spirit of forgiveness wherever I am, be a sacrifice in the odour of sweetness after every Communion.

Our Holy Rule teaches us to pray for the living and the dead, and to offer the graces that are vouchsafed to us, especially in the Sacrament of the Altar, for the different intentions that the command of our Superiors, the requests of our benefactors, or the wants of the poor and of the dying may suggest. May every prayer for the living, that the afflicted may be comforted, that the sick may be cured, that the hungry may be fed, and the houseless may be sheltered, be blessed by Thee as an act of adoration on account of my Communion. May Thy Dear and Immaculate Mother take me in Her train when She visits the Stations of the Cross; and as She receives from me every Indulgence that I can gain, and applies it for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, may She

give me tender pity for them, and offer it and all my efforts to shorten their imprisonment, and hasten their entrance into glory, as the full and overflowing gratitude of my heart for Her goodness in persuading Her Divine Son to overlook my unworthiness, my baseness, and my sinfulness and sloth, and to come to me in the Holy Communion.

Sweet Mother of Mercy, let this New Year be marked by a deep and unceasing feeling of gratitude whenever I make my thanksgiving after Communion, and am thus reminded of Thy Communion, when St. John said Mass before Thee, and of the Communion of Jesus when He bequeathed His Adorable Body and Blood to us, and promised never to leave us: 'Behold, *I am* with you all days to the end of the world.' (St. Matt. xxviii. 20.)

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MEDITATION XI.

The Interior Life.

MY Dear and Immaculate Mother, deign to guide me by Thy instructions, and make me understand the mystery of the interior life which I feel to be the life most pleasing to Thy Divine Son. *Ave Maria.*

When our Dear Lord and Spouse was in the house of Martha and Mary, it must have been more perfect as a model of a true community than any religious house of our days. There were verified the words, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am in the midst of them.' When they were in joy, our Lord condescended to visit them; when they were in sorrow for the death of their brother, He came to them and wept with them. It was natural that they should offer Him the best

hospitality that they could afford, and that they should devote all the time to the preparation for such a banquet as the Friend of their brother in life and after death might expect. Our Lord was weary when He sat by the well near Samaria, and He may often have come to their house weary from His journey. The pilgrimages through the villages when He went about doing good were not performed without fatigue. The work of mercy in healing the sick and giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb, when multitudes crowded about Him, may well shame us when we cry out for rest after we have visited one or two families. The Sermon on the Mount must have lasted longer than any class that we have ever been directed to teach for the advantage of His dear children. If He had pity on the crowd who were faint with following Him from place to place for three days, He must have borne hunger and thirst at the same time, although, unlike

ourselves, He never mentioned His own sufferings. He, Who had not where to lay His head, must have needed often the quiet of the house of Lazarus, and must have been refreshed by the meal which the sisters were permitted to place before Him. We sometimes mistake the answer which He gave to Martha, as if it only required souls, now toiling in their families, to come into the religious state, and thus choose the better part. But Martha and Mary had already left the world, and had followed their vocation by devoting their time, their means, their lives to our Lord. If He loved their family, He must have found their souls long dead to the world, for His friends were always such: the mortified and silent tenant of the wilderness, St. John the Baptist, the single-minded Apostle of purity and charity, St. John the Evangelist.

One day, perhaps when He was more weary than usual, or perhaps when His birthday, or some other festival, made her

more anxious to prepare a repast for Him, Martha found herself alone in the duties of the house. She complained, as we generally complain, that all the work was left to her, and she asked our Lord to tell Mary to come and help her. Mary was sitting at His feet, and was eagerly listening to His Divine words; and He at once replied, 'Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her.' (S. Luke x. 41, 42.) Both were Sisters of Mercy, both had consecrated themselves to His service, and neither would have left that Holy Convent for all the treasures of the world. But one persuaded herself that the outward duties were sufficient, and that perfection in them was the chief study of every true Religious. She could have listened, but the active work was, she thought, more attractive, and even more necessary. At the hour of meditation, when her sister

was buried in thought, and could not turn to earthly cares, Martha was anxious, and her mind was running from one subject to another. When our Lord was speaking, Mary was not silent only, but she had chosen the study and contemplation of His words as the better portion. There must have been times when Mary also had her share in the ordinary duties of the day; but however holy they were, even if they were directly intended for our Lord, He was to be preferred to them. Whenever He was willing to speak, she could not find it in her heart to be absent from Him. If she lived after the institution of the Most Blessed Eucharist, she would not have hurried over her preparation or her thanksgiving, for she would fear lest she should lose the presence of Jesus. When she was called away from Him, she would keep her thoughts with Him, and would sigh for her return. In her silence, she would long to hear His instructions; in her songs, she would re-

semble the Church: 'She employs the Divine Office and Psalmody that she may console herself during her absence from her heavenly Spouse.' (Urban VIII.) There is, therefore, within the solitude of the religious life, an inner solitude in which the Sisters must seek Jesus. When they see Him in the house He suddenly vanishes, and is only to be found near the Tabernacle. At stated hours He leaves this cherished abode, and if His children have in the mean time sought His Kingdom and have trusted that He, Who feeds the sparrows and clothes the grass of the field, will not forget them, they will find Him in the Refectory multiplying the loaves and fishes, so that none may go away empty. But He will be truly happy if He sees that, like Holy Tobias, they eat their bread in sorrow because of the works of mercy that are still unfulfilled, and that they are anxious to perform the highest work of mercy by taking Him from the Cross and burying Him at eventide in their

hearts: 'And when he had hid the body he eat bread with mourning and fear,' remembering the word which the Lord spoke by Amos the prophet: 'Your festival days shall be turned into lamentation and mourning.' (Tob. ii. 3, 4.) Why do I not sit with Mary? And when I hear Him describe the affliction that weighed upon His Sacred Heart as He thought of His desire to gather His children around Him in the religious state, as the hen gathers the chickens under her wings, and to shelter them, why do I not weep bitter tears, when I recollect how I have refused to live in the peaceful and holy interior life? In every Mass He calls me to Calvary in order that He may compel me to forget earthly cares, and may make me mourn over the blasphemy, the irreverence, the irreligion of the world, and see me willing to make myself a victim of reparation for the sins that have crucified Him. From time to time He sends for me, and chiding me because I have forgotten Him in

the midst of other thoughts, bids me to sit at His feet during the visits, that He may refresh my soul and make it cherish recollection and inward peace. At the most busy hours of the day, when every one seems to need our attention, He, moaning in the words of the Rule, wishes the voices of all to be hushed that He may, even for a moment, lead the soul into solitude and there speak to her heart. Nay, even after we have disobeyed Him and have forfeited the happiness of that real paradise, religious retirement, He still comes to the garden and calls His children, and seeks once more to exalt them to the sublime life from which they have fallen. He comes from Heaven and He calls them, sometimes to the splendour of the Transfiguration, sometimes to the anguish of the Mount of Olives, that He may make them understand that in joy or in sorrow they are to seek Him apart from their holiest friends, nay even apart from the rest of the Apostles, in the serene repose

of the interior life. Dear and Immaculate Mother and St. Joseph, your life was full of cares and anxious thoughts, and yet you were always hidden with Him; make us love always the depth of the interior life and its holy meditation.

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MEDITATION XII.

My Last Renewal of Vows.

MY Dear and Immaculate Mother, come with St. Joseph and help me to die. I have seen many of our beloved patients in sickness; and although no one has yet told me that death is near to myself, I feel as they have often seemed to me to feel, and therefore I entreat that the truth may be told at once clearly and candidly, and that I may prepare for my last hour. Thou art my

refuge and my hope before the throne of Thy Divine Son. *Ave Maria.*

Sisters, do not be afraid to speak to me about death, and let all your acts of patience and charity be so performed as to keep my mind fixed upon it. I thank you beforehand for all your goodness during the rest of my illness, and I hope you will pardon me if I do not receive my sufferings with meekness and resignation. I ask your forgiveness for all my omissions and faults, and for my want of zeal and fervour in the service of God. Pray for me, that my confession may be full of grief and contrition for my sins and for my ingratitude to our Dear God.

2. I have made my confession, and now I beg to renew my vows, and I wish I could make them with the faith, love, and joy with which our Beloved Spouse deserves to hear them pronounced.

(Here the Sister will repeat the following)

FORM OF RENEWAL.

My Dear Jesus, I renew with my whole heart my vows of Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and Love of the Poor; I offer them to Thy Immaculate Mother, I entreat Her to obtain pardon for my faults against the Holy Rule, and for all my sins, and to bless the Institute of Mercy.

Alas! my offering is not worthy of Him, and His Sweet Mother must consecrate it to Him and make amends for my coldness.

3. Soon our Lord and Father will come in the Sacrament of His Love. Help me, Sisters, to prepare for this my last Communion, and repeat the aspirations that best express my gratitude to Him for the visits which I have been allowed to make, the Communions that I have been permitted to receive, the Masses at which I have, by a special mercy, been able to assist. Make

with faith, hope, charity, contrition, and [illegible] for me. Say again and again the Holy Names, JESUS, MARY, JOSEPH, that St. Joseph may remind me of the Communion in which Mary was accustomed to receive Jesus.

4. How faint I am, and how my voice fails when I try to make my thanksgiving for my creation, my baptism, my vocation, my profession, and for this wonderful mark of our Lord's goodness in coming to our cell, and in shrouding His Glory that He may, in the Holy Viaticum, strengthen me for my last journey. My dear Angel, remind me of the journey of the Holy Family, that they may allow me to travel in their company. Ask all the Angels to sing hymns of praise to our Lord for my Communion.

5. Dear St. James, thy words have often taught me the duties of a true Sister of Mercy, and I have often thought of thee [illegible]en I have spoken to the children and to

the dying of the holy sacrament of Extreme Unction. Tell me how to dispose my heart for this special grace, won for me amidst the anguish and desolation of the Cross. Kind and Immaculate Mother, help me to make an act of real and perfect contrition, that I may receive the blessings given by this Sacrament, and may triumph over sin and over all the remnants of sin. If it pleases our Lord that the prayer of faith used by His priest shall raise me up and restore my health when I am anointed, I promise to devote every moment of my time, every thought of my heart, every action of my life, to the Sacred Heart of our Lord.

6. Ask the priest to be so good as to give me the Plenary Indulgence before I die, and repeat short Indulgenced prayers all through my illness, that I may relieve the Holy Souls before I go away. After my death, make the Stations, and apply some Indulgences for me, for I shall need all your compassion until God, in His mercy, gives

me, after the Purgatory that I deserve, a mansion in His Kingdom.

7. Let me tell you my favourite prayers, in order that you may repeat them when I am unable to utter them myself. Add to them the Holy Names, for they are full of joy and heavenly balm to soothe my soul in its last struggle. How sweet is our devotion to MARIA DESOLATA on Good Friday! Repeat the points of our meditation for me:

1. Mary feeling Her loneliness when Jesus expired.

2. Mary lonely when He was laid in Her arms.

3. Mary lonely when She saw the Tomb closed.

4. Mary lonely when She returned to Her home without Her Divine Son.

8. Sisters, pray for me and ask the children in the school to pray for me, that I may have the crowning grace of final perseverance. Sprinkle the cell and the bed with holy water, that the evil one may not

dare to approach the poor cabin which our Lord has so lately honoured by His presence.

9. It will distract me to see my relatives more than once; and if even one visit is not according to our Holy Rule, or to the advice of physicians, I am willing to offer up the sacrifice of my own feelings for the sake of the Holy Rule.

10. Whenever the end is near, do not wait for me to ask for the prayers of the Church for those who are in their agony. May my sighs and sufferings, and may every beat of my pulse, and every look, and every moan continue to express, long after I have become speechless, gratitude to St. Joseph, affection to Mary Immaculate, and child-like confidence in our Adorable Saviour.

11. It has been a long night and I have slept little, but St. Joseph seemed to tell me of the long night when he went, anxious and sleepless, over rough and unknown ways, with our Infant Saviour into Egypt, and I

tried to keep near Him when my head was weary, and I could scarcely pray.

12. It is now midday, and I am restless and impatient, but my ever kind and thoughtful Mother, Mary Immaculate, tells me that at twelve Her Beloved Jesus was laid on the rough hard bed of the Cross, and was left upon it for three hours, which were long, far longer than my illness. Jesus, I come, and my vows are in my hand and in my heart.

(If the Sister cannot speak easily, she may point out paragraphs of the above to her Sisters.)

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MEDITATION XIII.

The Presentation of Mary.

MY Kind and Immaculate Mother, be pleased to tell me the feelings with which I ought to renew my vows this morn-

ing, in order that I may be worthy to follow Thee to the Temple, when St. Anne presented Thee to the Lord and witnessed the consecration of Thy pure and holy Heart to Him. *Ave Maria.*

The home of Mary was full of spiritual joy, and was hallowed by the presence of Her blessed parents, and of Her whose holiness surpassed the united holiness of all the Saints and Angels whom God had created, or ever intended to create. But when She heard the voice that called Her to sacrifice all that was only dear to Her because it was at the same time so pleasing to Her Heavenly Father, She arose up in haste and entreated St. Anne to offer Her to Him. It was hard to leave such a gentle mother and to dwell amongst strangers, and it was hard for St. Anne to part with her child, then of such tender age. St. Joachim accompanied them, and felt how cold and cheerless their cottage would be when its light and its glory were gone from it. But that innocent child was

to see many a break in the happiness of home: the flight into Egypt, the absence of the three days, the death of St. Joseph, the beginning of Her Son's apostolic life, and the days of their farewell before His Passion, the separation on Calvary, Her return with St. John instead of Jesus to Her lonely cottage from Calvary. She sought ever and desired only that His will should be done on earth as it is in heaven, and therefore She went generously to the Temple and dedicated Herself and all Her love for Her parents to Him. May all that has checked the full and cordial offering of my poor heart to God be taken away! May I renounce freely and once for all everything that has tended to weaken in me the willing and earnest renewal of my vows! Dearest Mother, conceived without stain of sin, lead me to His Throne and pronounce the words with the princely and noble affection of Thy own consecration, *spiritu principali confirma me.*

Yet the affection of Mary was full of reverential awe and profound adoration, for She had long contemplated the Infinite dignity of Him before Whom the nine Angelic Choirs veil their faces and bow down. She wondered and wondered again, when She thought of His condescension in accepting the love of His creatures, the work of His hands, who are removed an immeasurable distance from Him. She saw in the vision of Isaias the ladder of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and prayed for the gifts of filial fear and child-like piety, in order that She might know how to render Her homage perfect in His eyes. She looked towards the Holy of Holies, and poured forth, in tears, the feelings of respect and honour which even She could not express in words. She gazed upon the splendour of the mysterious glory that dwelt in the Sanctuary, and admired the boundless goodness of Him Who dwells in light inaccessible, and yet wishes to raise up our lowliness and

make us partakers of His Divine nature, in order that our souls may look upon Him face to face, and may live evermore in the city which 'hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof.' (Apoc. xxi. 23.) Let me stand afar off without presuming to approach the Altar, or even to 'lift up my eyes towards Heaven, but strike my breast, saying, O God, be merciful to me a sinner.' (S. Luke xviii. 13.) How can I venture to kneel at His feet without fear and trembling when I think that my vows, so faintly pronounced and so imperfectly kept, are all I have to offer to His Majesty, and that I have so seldom meditated upon His stupendous attributes?

In the *Magnificat*, which was the renewal at a later time of the offering made in Her childhood, the inspired words of Mary are a song of gratitude for the favours which She has received, and for the goodness where-

with the Lord has deigned to welcome Her. Years have passed since I first made my vows, and I may well be astonished at the mercy with which I am visited when He allows me to repeat them. Yet no hymn of thankfulness has hailed the dawn of this day, the day for which my good Angel has prayed and waited, in the hope that my fervent acknowledgments of the unceasing kindness of our Lord may induce His Immaculate Mother to own me as one of Her Sisterhood, and to carry my petitions and my renewal to Him. Alas, it is too true that I have never thanked and blessed God; and before it is too late, I entreat Thee, my Immaculate Mother, to take my heart and cleanse and purify it, and adorn it with generosity, awe, and gratitude, and to say the words for me in order that He may not hear my voice, but may listen to Thine, whilst Thou art exulting in His goodness and art magnifying His name, because He has regarded the humility of His hand-

maid, and has admitted my vows once more. Glorious St. Joseph, ask Him to perfect and confirm and establish us in the determination to cherish the Holy Rule, and to support one another by our good example, our piety, our devotion, and our charity.

Dear and powerful St. Joseph, we beseech thee to ask our Holy and Immaculate Mother to lay before the Manger in which our Infant Saviour will receive the adoration and offerings of the Wise Men, the seven petitions which, in honour of thy Seven Joys and of Her Seven Joys, we desire to present to Him.

1. May our Community always possess and encourage in Sisters, Novices, and children a tender devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament, in order that they may keep the remembrance of it wherever they may be!

2. May the very sound of the name of Mary Immaculate make us happy, filling

our hearts with the thought that She is the Mother of Mercy, and that we have always been, especially in our vocation, the objects of Her maternal affection and favour!

3. May our kind protector St. Joseph make us zealous for the souls of the children, anxious to draw them around us, watchful over them, and afraid whenever we lose sight of them!

4. May our Guardian Angels promote peace and charity amongst us, and keep our eyes, like their own, always fixed on the face of our Father Who is in Heaven; and may the harmony which makes all our Angels united with the Angel of the Community help us to accomplish great things as a Community, as well as individually, for the glory of our Divine Spouse!

5. May our vows be accepted, and may they be more welcome than ever to our Dear Lord on account of the lively faith, the strong hope and filial love, and the spirit of reparation for sin, with which we offer them to His

Sacred Heart! May our Institute flourish everywhere through zeal, piety, and love of the Holy Rule!

6. May we delight to visit Him in the sick, feeling grief whenever we are deprived of the opportunity of going to them, and cherishing most those who are the poorest, and amongst the poorest those who are the most ungrateful and unkind to ourselves!

7. When our children neglect the Sacraments after they have left us, and when our poor die, let us continue, in a spirit of true mercy, to pray that God may display His fatherly compassion to them!

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Form of Renewal.

OMNIPOTENT and Eternal God,—I, Sister N., do ratify this day, in the presence of Thy Heavenly Court, the Vows which I made at my Profession; and promise faithfully to observe Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and the Service of the Poor, Sick, and Ignorant; and to persevere to the end of my life in this Congregation of our Blessed Lady of Mercy, according to its approved Rule and Constitution, and under Her Protection. I most humbly supplicate Thy Divine goodness, through the merits of Jesus Christ, to grant me grace to fulfil these obligations. Amen.

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Horarium for Retreat.

ACCORDING TO THE METHOD OF SAINT IGNATIUS.

5½ Rise.
6 Angelus. Meditation, No. 1.
7¼ Examination upon Meditation.
7½ Mass.
8¼ Breakfast. Free time.
9 Visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Office.
9½ Meditation, No. 2.
11 Examination on Meditation.
11¼ Visit. Free time.
¼12 Particular Examen.
12 Angelus, Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity, Litany.
1 Visit. Meditation. (This is often called the *Riforma*, and is made rather as an instruction on Prayer than as a Meditation. The Lecture may come here, and 9½ will remain open when the mind is more fresh for the Meditation.)
2 Examination on Meditation.
Then walk in Garden, Rosary. Free time.
4 Dinner.
5 Visit. Vespers. Free time.
¼6 Meditation, No. 3.
7¼ Reflection on Meditation.
7 Supper. Free time.
8¼ Matins and Lauds.
9 Examen. Night prayer.

✠

Some General Directions for Retreat.

OF MEDITATION.

THIS is the principal duty and object of the Retreat, and it must be made faithfully upon the subjects proposed, and in the order in which they are proposed. It is often advisable to make our good resolutions briefly, as they arise during the Meditation; for we sometimes forget them if we wait to collect our impressions at the end of the Meditation. As a rule, however, it is best to make them at the close of the Meditation, and not to interrupt our considerations and reflections.

OF REFLECTION ON MEDITATION.

In the short reflection or examen to be made after Meditation, three points should be carefully noted. 1. Whether we have been attentive to maintain the recollection of God's presence, with Whom we converse in prayer, whence proceeds great reverence even in our exterior conduct. 2. Whether we have applied the truths on which we meditated to ourselves in particular, with suitable reflections and resolutions. 3. Whether we have had regard to the practical amendment of our defects, and whether we have directed to this end the acts and affections of the will, which are the principal part of Meditation.

OF SILENCE AND RECOLLECTION.

During these days of Retreat, it is above all things necessary to observe silence and recollection most carefully, guarding the eyes from all curiosity, however innocent, and practising mortification of all the senses. All

books, writings, or whatever can lead to the slightest distraction, should be put aside; and spiritual writers advise that we exclude even those pious reflections which do not relate to the subject marked for Meditation, especially when retiring to rest and rising in the morning.

POINTS FOR EXAMEN DURING RETREAT.

1. Have I tried earnestly to overcome all inclination to weariness during the exercises?
2. Have I avoided with care all that might cause me distractions?
3. Have I been exact to observe silence both interiorly and exteriorly?
4. Have I made the review of each Meditation carefully?
5. Have I noted down the lights I received and the resolutions I made?
6. Have I avoided such thoughts as had no relation to the subjects which ought to occupy me?
7. Have I not read upon different subjects, or was I not engaged in thinking of that which should follow?

OF THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN.

The particular Examen may be made during these days on the defects which occur in performing the spiritual exercises, or in observing the regulations for Retreat.

OF FREE TIME.

The Free Time is to be employed: 1. In writing down briefly the lights received and resolutions made during Meditation. 2. In reading the books assigned for Retreat, and no others. 3. In preparing for Confession, and in examining how all the Duties are performed. 4. In prayer or meditation. 5. In such manual works as duty requires, and which will not prove a source of distraction.

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